

Alexander Ramsey House ("Mansion House")  
265 South Exchange Street (corner Walnut Street)  
St. Paul  
Ramsey County  
Minnesota

HABS No. MINN-48

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ALEXANDER RAMSEY HOUSE ("MANSION HOUSE")

HABS No. MINN-48

Address: 265 South Exchange Street (corner Walnut Street),  
St. Paul, Ramsey County, Minnesota.

Present Owner: The Minnesota Historical Society, 690 Cedar  
Street, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Present Use: Being prepared for opening (in 1965) as a public  
museum.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Alexander Ramsey purchased the property at the west corner of South Exchange and Walnut Streets in 1850. He promptly built a house and he and his family lived there until the fall of 1868, when the building was moved across the street to permit the construction of their "Mansion House." Completed in the fall of 1872, the magnificent stone house became the Governor's permanent residence until his death in 1903.

The Ramsey's daughter, Marion, was married to Charles E. Furness in 1875, and she came to live in the "Mansion House" after Mrs. Ramsey's death in 1884. Mrs. Furness died in 1935 and was survived by her two daughters, Laura and Anna, who continued living there until their deaths-- Laura in 1959, and Anna in 1964. The house, furnishings, and grounds were inherited by the Minnesota Historical Society, and are currently being prepared for opening as a public museum.

2. Date of erection: 1868-72.
3. Architect: Monroe Sheire, of the office of M. Sheire and Bro., Architect, and Leonard and Sheire, Builders, St. Paul. (The firm was composed of Monroe Sheire, Romaine Sheire, and Charles Leonard).
4. Builders, etc.: Leonard and Sheire, builders of foundation walls; John Summers, masonry contractor for the rest of house; Matthew Taylor, master carpenter and supervisor of construction; J. F. Tostevin, designer and builder of marble fireplace mantelpieces. All were from St. Paul.

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5. Notes on original plan and construction of building:  
Excavation for the basement of the "Mansion House" was begun in the fall of 1868. The contract for the foundation work was given to Leonard and Sheire, Builders (of the office of M. Sheire and Bro., Architect, and Leonard and Sheire, Builders, St. Paul). The following is the bid submitted by the firm to Mr. Ramsey:

Saint Paul Sep 22<sup>nd</sup> 1868

Hon. A. Ramsey

Dear Sir

The estimated cost of putting in the basement walls of your Building to underside of floor joists. including basement door and window frames and cut stair caps and sills

Amts to \$2,500.00

For which amt we will contract to do it. or we will supervise the work making as good contract as possible for you.

Yours truly

Leonard & Sheire

That phase of the construction was completed in the spring of 1869, and the following is the bill for payment submitted to Mrs. Ramsey from the "Office of M. Sheire & Bro., Architect, and Leonard & Sheire, Builders:"

St. Paul, Minn. April 28th 1869

Mrs. Alexander Ramsey

Dear Madam. We have completed the foundation walls of your building corner of Walnut and exchange street. as per agreement.

The a/c stands as follows

Amt. as per agreement	\$2500 <sup>00</sup> / <sub>100</sub>
Received Nov.17th 1868	<u>500 <sup>00</sup>/<sub>100</sub></u>

Amt due us \$2000 <sup>00</sup>/<sub>100</sub>

It would accommodate us very much if you could remit to us the amount or the largest portion of it, say 80% or 85%. As we have had to lay out the cost to the workman engaged upon the work and for material.

/s/ Leonard & Shire  
Apl 28/69  
/s/ Mrs. Ramsey ansd  
My 3/69

What shall we do further with the building?  
Do you intend to have the walls built. the building enclosed and the roof on this season. Please let us know

Yours truly

Leonard & Sheire

The Ramseys apparently desired to proceed immediately with the construction of the rest of the house and the following is a letter giving an estimate for further costs:

St. Paul, Minn. June 1869

Hon Alexander Ramsey

Dear Sir

The estimate for putting your building under roof, amounts to thirteen thousand and five hundred dollars (\$13,500<sup>00</sup>)

This amt includes all cut stone except such as will be required for steps and verandahs. The stone and brick work in walls. Door and window frames. All joists in and roof on. and priming of all wood work required to be painted.

Yours truly

Leonard & Sheire

Leonard and Sheire engaged John Summers as masonry contractor, and Matthew Taylor as master carpenter and supervisor of construction. J. F. Tostevin, a St. Paul sculptor who received his training in the British Isles, was hired to design and produce the handsome marble mantelpieces which are in the large parlor.

The estimate for the complete job was as follows:

M. SHEIRE & BRO., ARCHITECTS,	Office of AND	LEONARD & SHEIRE, BUILDERS.
Charles Leonard, Monroe Sheire, Romaine Sheire.		St. Paul, Minn., Nov. 12 <sup>th</sup> 1870

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Hon. Alexander Ramsey

Dear Sir

We estimate the cost of completing your building in full as per plans and specifications exclusive of Plumbing heating and Marble mantles at Twenty six thousand (\$2600<sup>00</sup>) dollars and for which amt we will engage ourselves to complete the same.

If you should conclude to use pine throughout & ground for finish instead of hardwood as called for in specifications and roof of main part shingled instead of slate & tin as called for, it will make a difference of \$1,500<sup>00</sup> making the estimate then \$24,500<sup>00</sup><sub>xx</sub>

The cost to build with brick will be the same as the above

Yours truly

Leonard & Sheire

The complete architect's specifications for the construction of the house are included here:

SPECIFICATIONS  
of Dwelling House of

Mrs. Alex. Ramsey

Cor. Walnut and Exchange St.

Saint Paul, Minn.

(Specifications of building on Walnut & Exchange Sts.)

May 1871

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(1)

Specifications

Location,	of the work and materials necessary for the erection and completion of a three story stone dwelling house, proposed to be erected on the northwest corner of Walnut and Exchange Sts. in the city of Saint Paul, State of Minn, by Mrs. Alex Ramsey, in accordance with plans elevations, section and detail, hereunto belonging, prepared by M. Sheire & Bros. Arch <sup>ts</sup> .
Size,	The size shall be that of the foundation now built.
Height of stories	The building to be two stories and a finished attic in height. Back part two stories only. In main part the 1st story to be 13 ft high, 2nd story 11 ft, 3rd story 10'6" high. Back part, 1st story 11 ft high, 2nd 10 ft all in the clear.
Height of water table	The top of watertable to be 1/2 in above top of floor.
Height of walls	The walls of the main part, from top of watertable to top of pier caps to be twenty six feet, and from top of caps to top of plaster 4 ft and one inch.
Walls of back part	The walls of back part from watertable to lower edge of frieze to be 22'6in then 3 ft to top of wall plate. then up to roof boards between the rafters. The walls of main part to be built from plate to top of Jack brackets or to underside of dormer windows.
Range work,	(2) Above the watertable, the walls shall be laid up with rough range work to underside of frieze, then drawn in, as shown on details.
Watertable,	To be a watertable 9 in thick, beveled as shown, and go entirely around building
Stone best quality,	The courses of range work to be of uniform thickness, entirely around building, and be of best blue limestone free from yellow spots and other defects. The corner piers shall all be returned square, and be well anchored and bound together,
Thickness of stone	Courses to be from seven to nine in thick

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Tuck pointing,

All the range work of the entire building, shall be well pointed with what is commonly called tuck pointing, viz, joints to be well flushed with mortar, colored the same as the stone, then pointed with a raised joint of finishing mortar cut to a uniform width of  $3/8$  of an inch.

Joints flushed

All joints in rubble work and backing, shall be well flushed inside and outside.

Stone work  
between joists

The foundations walls to be carried up to top of floor joists.

Binders

The face of wall and backing, shall be well bound together with sufficient number of face stones, running through the full thickness of wall, and at every door and window jamb as, many as three stones shall run through the full thickness of wall. The corbels shall run through the wall as binders,

(3)

Frames set back

The boxes of frame, will set back five in, from face of wall, and stones made to fit on boxes, but clear them  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in inside as shown on details.

Openings arched

All the openings in the walls shall be arched on the inside, on lintels of  $2" \times 6"$  scantling cut in the form of a segment of a circle, and be prepared and furnished by carpenter.

Furring strips

Strip of fencing to be built in the inside of all outside walls, every three feet, for the purpose of nailing furring to.

Anchors,

To be four iron anchors in walls of each side of main part in each tier of joists of 2nd and 3rd stories, and three on each side of each of second floor and ceiling joists of back part. All to be of  $3/8" \times 1\frac{1}{4}$  iron and three feet long, and be hooked and spiked into joists and hooked into outside stone of wall and the joists so anchored, to be well and firmly anchored together, so as to form a strong tie across the building. To be two good iron anchors in each tier of joists mentioned, in both front and rear walls, fastened into strips of dry hard pine,  $2' \times 4"$  square, and ten ft long, cut diagonally into joists and firmly spiked. The anchors to be hooked and spiked into

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strips and hooked into outerstone of wall.

Strips under joists	Bond strips shall be built in the walls, bedded in mortar and laid level under all floor and ceiling joists.
Area walls,	To be area walls built around all basement windows and cellar way, and be covered with wide flags, where not covered by verandahs.
Cellar steps	The outside cellar steps to be of stone and in one piece each, quarried for the purpose, and built in the walls of cellar way, which wall shall be of range work.
Coping.	The coping or flags and cellar steps to be rough hammered, and six in. thick.
Rubble work,	All area and stone partition walls to be of best quality rubble work, as well as all foundation walls inside stone piers and walls above lower edge of frieze.
Brick partition	The walls on each side of hall in main part, to be of brick, one foot thick and made as shown on plans, with flues etc. complete. Smoke flue to be well and smoothly plastered inside. Pier in laundry to be of brick
1/2 in strip in wall	to be 1/2 in. strip built in brick partitions at a proper height from floor to nail base to, also wooden brick to built in at all door jambs.
Chimneys	The chimneys to be topped out as shown on elevations.
Lintels put in by mason,	All lintels bond timbers etc to be put in by mason, but furnished by carpenter
Mortar,	Mortar for the entire building shall be of the best quality, consisting of not less than one part of unslaked lime, to four parts of good sharp sand for stone work, and for brick work, one part lime to three parts of sand.
Mortor run off	All mortor used, to be slaked and run off at least three days before being used.
Flashings	Tin flashings to be built in rear wall at junction of roof of back part with main wall, and at all chimneys.
Hauling cut stone.	The mason to haul all cut stone.



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(5)

### Cut Stone

#### Cut stone.

The cut stone to be window and door caps and sills, watertable, caps to piers, and across front projection, steps to front and side entrances, capping of abutments to front and side steps, steps from verandah on Walnut St. side, and pilasters of front door way, which will return, as shown on details.

#### Caps

The window and door caps to be made as shown on details and elevations, excepting in the rear and south side of back part, where they will be square and plain.

#### Window sills,

The window sills to be moulded as shown, excepting in back part, and where covered by verandahs in main part. Watertable to be made as shown on details.

#### Caps to Piers

Caps to piers to be six in. thick and across front projection to be made as shown on elevation, as will also the caps of abutments of steps.

#### Front doorsill

The front door sill to be 3 1/2" from front to back and seven feet from side to side, and be countersunk so that level of watertable will go around pilaster and be a slip sill.

#### Doorsills,

That to side entrance to be 2' 6" side and four ft. long.

Those from back hall and kitchen to be 23" wide and 3' 8" long.

#### Steps

The front step to be made as shown and be not more than seven in. high as well also the other stone steps.

All the steps to rest at least, two in. on the step below it.

The steps from side verandah to have quire ends and project two in over abutment and be dressed on return.

(6)

#### Walls made true for woodwork

In all places on walls where woodwork joins as column of verandahs, the walls shall be made smooth and true, with a margin of half an inch each side of wood work. This work to be done by stone cutter.

### Carpenter Work

#### Home

All the floor joists in main and back parts to be 2" x 12", ceiling joists and rafters

2" x 6" hip and volley rafters 2" x 10", deck joists and wall plates 2" x 12", inclined rafters and plates inside studding 2" x 4", furring for main part 2" x 2" back part 1 1/4" x 2"

Deck joists	Deck joists to be raised in middle as shown on section.
Joists on wall,	Joists to enter walls at least six inches.
Distance apart,	All the joists, furring and studding to be placed, not to exceed 16" from centers, rafters 20" heaters to be framed in around all flues if necessary
Double studding	to be double studding at all door jambs at front door jambs, the studding to be 2" x 6" as shown.
Jack brackets	Supporting or jack brackets to be as shown and marked on details.
Slate,	The curved portion of roof to be covered with matched fencing, securely nailed to each rafter, then with best quality of slate of colors shown on elevations, or directed by architects.
Roof	The roof of back part, to be covered with good sound common boards, then with XX fine shingles, and laid not more than 4 1/2 in. to the weather, The roof of main part above slate, to be covered with best I. C. Roofing tin on matched boards.
Bridging	All joists over eighteen feet long, to be bridged with two rows of lattice bridging, less than 18 ft. with one row.
Partitions trussed	All partitions not placed directly over one below, it shall be trussed thus so as to prevent the weight falling on the floor.
Lumber seasoned	All the lumber to be well seasoned before being used in the building.
Cornices	The cornices to be made, as shown on details and elevations.
Gutters	The gutters to be lined with tin as shown.
Conductors,	To be two 4 1/2 conductors from gutters of main part to that of back part, and in rear of back part, to be two six in. conductors from gutter to ground.
I. K. Tin	All to be of best I K tin.

Flashings at dormer windows	At junction of dormer windows with roof, there shall be a piece of tin, to each course of slate, and be turned up under outer covering of dormer windows.
Tin Work	The deck of both parts dormer windows, bay windows, and verandahs to be covered with tin on matched fencing
I C Tin	All the tin for gutters, covering, etc, not otherwise mentioned to be of best I C tin.
Dormer windows,	The dormer windows to be made as shown, the covering on sides to be of narrow matched boards. The inside to be finished as shown. The spandrels of window frames to be paneled.
Flooring	The first and second story floors to be laid with best quality narrow mill dressed flooring, well seasoned, and not to exceed four in. wide. The rest of the floors, not to exceed six, All to be blind nailed to each joist. To be no floor in basement except in laundry.
Tile floor	The floor of vestibule to be of tile of fine pattern, laid in cement on brick.
Verandahs,	The verandahs to be made as shown on plans, elevations and details. The ceiling boards to be matched flooring, smoothed and beaded and center beaded, and be well seasoned. To be put on transversely to the verandah. The floors to be not more than four in. wide and be finished with nosing and (scotia,)
Grounds	Grounds for plastering, as shown on details, shall be put on around all openings and wherever wood work joins plastering, excepting for base, as the plastering goes down to the floor.
Finish put on,	All finish to be put on after the plastering is put on, except the stairs, and they and they shall be well covered with boards.
Return beads,	Around windows and doors to be double furring as shown.
Window frames	To be return beads at all outer angles of plastering
Square inside	All the windows in the building shall have counterchecked box frames with axle pulleys, and made with semicircle a segment heads, as shown on elevation, except in rear and south sides of back part, where they will be square. The heads of segment and semicircle windows to be made square inside with 3/8 of parting strip square with the inside portion of heads, that the inside portion of sash may slide to full height of frame.

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Architraves of  
windows segment

Those having long lights in sash, shall be made, so that the lower sash may be raised its full height. The architraves of windows in 1st, 2 stories main part to be a segment, and finished and put on as shown for doors on detail.

Sash,

The sash to be 1 3/4 in. thick  
For cellar to be made for 16 x 24 glass.  
1st story main part for 32" x 48" but the lower part of front window to be for 32" x 70" and inside hall for 32" x 62"  
2nd story main part for 32" x 40" excepting for the small windows in front, which will be for 20" x 40" upper lights and 20" x 60" lower lights, Dormer windows for 16" x 30" and 36" excepting over front door, which will be, in large sash 15" x 34" and 42", for small ones 12" x 24" and 36". In 1st story back part for 15 x 40, 2nd story 15" x 36".

Glass

The glass in 1st and 2nd stories main part to be of polished french plate, excepting in side hall. In basement, side hall main part, and back part, 1st quality double thick french, and in attic single thick french glass. In vestibule doors to be figured french plate 20" x 80". In outside door of back hall to be glass panels of double thick french glass, in one pane each.

Scuttle,

In deck of main part to be a scuttle for access to deck, and made strong and water-tight, and be 2'6" wide and 5 ft long, and be covered with rough glass, for the purpose of lighting passage to deck.

Window weights  
and locks

All the windows except cellar windows to be hung with weights, by good sash cord, and fastened with plated sash locks in main part and dining room, but in the attic and the rest of the house to be brass sash locks.

Transom lights

To be transom lights of ground figured glass over both front and side doors, in one light each.

Sash of  
Black Walnut

The sash to be of black walnut wood in 1st story main part, the rest to be of fine but grained black walnut.

(10)

Ash in frames

The window frames to have pullystiles, head, parting strips and stafs of ash in 1st story and made as shown on details.

Panel jambs

The panel jambs in 1st story main part, to be made of butternut wood, but the rope moulding around panels to be of black walnut, and made as shown on details.

In second story to be made the same, but to be of pine.

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Inside shutters,

The inside shutters to be of butternut wood in 1st and 2nd stories main part, and in dining room to have black walnut rope moulding around panels of outside leaves. The rest to have square joints without the moulding.

To be made in four leaves to each window and each leaf in two parts, divided at meeting rail of sash. The outside leaves to be paneled, and made to fit in box. The two center leaves to be made with horizontal pivot slats and connected with ash rods. The small windows in front to have shutters in three leaves, middle leaf of slats.

The lower part of middle leaves to first and side hall shutters to be paneled.

Shutter hinges

In 1st & 2nd stories main part, to be hung with plated 1 1/2" x 2" shutter hinges put on with plated screws, the rest with brass shutter hinges of same size and brass screws.

Shutter bars

Those shutters hung with plated hinges will be fastened with two in. plated shutter bars and put on with plated screws and trimmed with plated knobs. The rest with brass bars and screws, and trimmed with pearl white knobs.

Door frames

The outside door frames to main part to be made as shown, of black walnut wood, but the panels of oak or ash wood, also the frames in brick partitions in first story, but the door stops throughout 1st story main part to be of ash wood.

(11)

Front door

The front door to be made in two thicknesses well glued and screwed together to be in two leaves of 2' 10 1/2" each and eight ft. high, with heavy raised mouldings on both sides as shown, the panels to be of oak or ash wood, but the rest of black walnut. All as shown on elevation and details. To be a heavy carved panel piece in upper panel of each leaf, and be of black walnut.

Doors,

The doors in 1st & 2nd stories main part, and dining room, to be 2 1/4" thick with heavy raised mouldings on both sides, with segment top, excepting in dining room where they will be square top. All as shown on details and section.

Those in 1st story main part to be of black walnut including rope moulding around panels, but the panels to be of oak or ash wood. In the other parts of the house. The doors to be of pine and of sizes marked on plans, and shown on section.

Sliding doors,

To be sliding doors between library and reception rooms 4' 6" x 10' 6" each with segment top as shown on section for double doors from hall.

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Folding doors

To be folding doors from hall to parlor and reception rooms 6' x 10'6" each as shown on plans and section.

Door butts

All the doors in 2nd story main part and dining room to be hung with three 4 1/2" x 5 1/4" Japanned butts with acorn tips, and in

other parts of the house, except in 1st story main part, with two 4 1/2" x 4 1/2" loose joint cast butts,

In 1st story main part, with three 5 1/2" x 5 1/2" Japanned silver plated tipped butts to each door.

Front door lock

The front door to be trimmed with a heavy mortise rebated front door lock, with night keys, bolt, etc. complete, plated face and strike, knobs and furniture. The door to side entrance to have front door lock as above.

(12)

Locks,

All the doors in 1st story main part, to be trimmed with good six in. tumbler mortise locks, having plated face, strike, knobs, etc.

The folding doors to have rebated locks also the vestibule doors. The sliding doors, rebated lock, all trimmed as above shown.

The rest of the doors in the house, above basement, with good five in mortise tumbler locks, with brass face strike, bolts, keys, etc., pearl white knobs, plated roses escutcheons, etc.

Sliding doors,

The sliding doors, between library and reception rooms, to be made to slide into double partitions on six in iron sheaves, with brass track. They will meet with a silver plated artragal, on the whole length of stile, and fastened with a regular artragal lock and have plated knobs on both doors.

Flush bolts,

The inside leaf of all double doors to be furnished with two heavy flush bolts, and placed in the rabbet of the door.

Inside finish,

The inside finish, such as architraves around doors, windows, base, door frames etc. shall be as shown on details and section.

Wainscotting,

Instead of there being base in kitchen and storeroom, the walls shall be ceiled up or wainscotted 2'6" high, with narrow matched ceiling-smoothed and beaded and center beaded, and placed vertically and finished with nosing and scotia for capping.

Base,

The lower member of base in 1st story main part, to be ash, the upper of black walnut.

Stairs,

The front stairs to be placed where shown, and have platform in first story of same height as (13)

The rail to be continuous from newel on first floor till it passes around well in attic. The run of each step to 11 in, with a step 12 1/2 in. wide 1 3/8" thick finished with nosing, scotia, fillet returned on outside stringer.

Angle of step and riser to be finished with a scroll bracket as shown. All of which will return around well to end of rail.

The use of stairs not to exceed seven inches to each step.

Each riser to be one in, thick tongued into step above it, and lower step to be tongued into riser. The riser to be mitered into outside stringer and fillet.

To be swell steps at top and bottom as shown on plans.

Stringers,

The stringers both outside and inside. Cylinder riser and scroll to be of black walnut, but the step, fillet and scotia will be of ash wood, also the balusters.

Newel & rail,

The newel and rail to be of black walnut.

Stairs supported

The stairs to be supported by two 4" x 6" carriages to each set of steps, also in addition to be one next to wall 2" x 6" square.

Cylinder

The stairs will be 3'10 1/2" in wide with a 30 inch cylinder at the head of each set, around which the rail and balusters will return.

Newel,

The newel to be 15 in. square at base, and made as shown, on section. Each side of the octagon shaft to be paneled 3/8" deep with rope moulding around panel. The panel to be oak knot veneering. The rail to be as shown. The balusters to be square at base and top, with octagonal shaft, but turned at each end of shaft. and be 2 3/4" square at base and top. All as shown on section.

(14)

Box stairs,

To be box stairs from back hall to second story back part with butternut rail 5" newel, and turned balusters around well, as shown on plans.

Stairs to deck,

To be plain box stairs from hall in third story to roof, as shown on section

Basement stairs,

Under back stairs from back has to be box stairs to basement.

Ventilators,

To each ventilating flue there shall be one opening near ceiling in each of the rooms in 1st and 2nd stories main part. two in kitchen, dining room, one near the ceiling, and the other near the

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floor, and covered with patent ventilating registers 10" x 14" square. In other rooms with two 9" x 12".

Plumbing,

Each bathroom will be furnished with a bathtub, marble top wash stand, and an Excelsior Valve Water closet with silver plated cups and full, and french closet bowl, and each chamber and bedroom in 2nd story with a marble top washstand.

All the bath tubs, water closets, and wash stands to be ceiled up with black walnut ceiling beaded and placed vertically. To be a door with brass trimmings in ceiling of each stand.

Each bowl to be furnished a silver plated china stopple and two cocks for hot and cold water.

Hot & cold water,

The bathtubs, wash stands, washtubs in laundry, sinks in kitchen and pantry to be furnished with hot and cold water.

Hot water to come from copper boiler in kitchen.

The boiler to be connected with waterpipes, and water heater by a coil pipe in kitchen range, or water back. The coil pipe to be of iron.

The hot water boiler to have round top and contain forty gallons.

(15)

Soil pipes,

The soil pipe from water closet seat and over dining room, to be built in wall, that from the other bathroom will pass down through partition of back hall.

Waste pipes,

The wash bowls and bath tubs to have waste pipes, which with soil pipe and waste pipes from sinks and wash tubs in laundry, etc. to be made to enter drain the locality of which will be hereafter determined.

Plumbing by  
proprietor,

All the work and materials relating to plumbing, to be furnished by proprietor, excepting the ceiling around bath tubs and wash stands.

All the pipes required for plumbers work to be of good heavy lead pipe and of suitable sizes required for each part.

Iron sinks,

To be an iron sink in kitchen 24" x 48" and one in pantry 20" x 30, with pipes supplying hot and cold water.

Closets, etc.  
furnished,

The pantry, china closet side board and store room to be furnished with suitable bins, or drawers, as shown on plans.

All the rest of the closets shall have one shelf six ft. high entirely around closets, resting on a strip 5" wide, which shall be supplied with good strong double clothes hooks, and be not more than 10"



from each other.

Laundry,

The laundry to be furnished with at least four wash tubs, etc.

Finish in closets,

The closets will be furnished with single architrave and single base, on the inside, placed outside of plastering.

(16)

Cellar doors,

The outside cellar doors shall be hung with 4" x 4" butts, and be two in. thick with four panels square joints, in two leaves, and trimmed with heavy rim lock and 8" spring bolt at top and bottom, and have plain plank frame.

The doors leading from vegetable cellar at foot of basement stairs to 1 3/4" thick, 4 paneled square joints hung with 4" x 4" butts and furnished with good rim locks.

Outside cellar doors to be two in. thick.

Outside paint,

The cornices, dormer windows, verandahs, railing around deck, shall receive three good coats of pure lead and oil paint and sanded with two coats of sand, put on immediately after the last two coats of paint, all the window frames will receive three coats of paint as above, except sand on outside of sash. The paint to be of light brown or free stone color. The sides of dormer windows to be a very light drab. That portion of roof, covered with tin, shall receive two coats of light colored slate.

Inside painting  
and graining,

The 2nd story main part to be grained in imitation of corresponding parts in 1st story main part. The 3rd story and back part to be grained a light oak. All the cellar doors and wood work therein to be painted three coats of oak ground, as also will the laundry.

Varnish

All graining to be done on three coats of ground and receive two coats of copal varnish.

Oiling

All the woodwork in oak, ash, butternut and black walnut to receive three good coats of raw linseed oil, well rubbed down.

Glazing,

The glazing to be done in the best manner glass well bedded pointed and puttied.

(17)

Plastering,

All the walls and ceilings in first and second stories main part, and dining room, except closets, to be lathed and plastered with three coat work hard finish, all the rest of the house including closets, laundry and passage from kitchen with two

coat work hard finish.

White lime,  
Mortar

All the lime used to be white a Port Byron lime and all the mortar to be mixed with a sufficient quantity of good hair to make a good bond.

Frescoing,

The 1st and 2nd stories main part and dining room, to be frescoed, and kitchen painted on the plastered walls and ceilings, all in oil colors. All to be at option of owner and not to be included in estimate.

At option of  
owner

Furnace,

To be a no. 24 Lawsons coal furnace where shown on foundation plan. To be tin pipes in brick and stud partitions from furnace to rooms in 1st and 2nd stories, of sufficient capacity to warm the respective rooms.

Registers,

Registers to be in partitions except in halls, where they will be in floor, as shown. Registers to be 10" x 14", all to be placed where shown. There in the floor to be 15" x 20".

All the registers and ventilators to be of Tuttles & Bouley's manufacture.

Cold Air Box,

To be a cold air box where shown on foundation plans, and be of capacity equal to the aggregate capacity of the hot air pipes from furnace.

Furnace, etc.  
furnished by  
owner,

Furnace and all parts relating to heating and ventilation to be furnished and set by owner.

(18)

Mantles,

To be two marble mantles in parlor and one in each of the following rooms, viz, Reception room, library and the four chambers in 2nd story main part, each to be supplied with grate and summer front, etc, all to be furnished and set by proprietor.

Bells,

To be bells in kitchen from the following, viz, Parlor, reception room, library, four chambers in 2nd story main part, bedrooms in 2nd story back part and bath rooms, and from both front and side doors. One from the family room over library to servants room in attic.

Tubes,

The wires to all to be run in tubes, which will be put in before the plastering is done.

Speaking tube,

To be a speaking tube etc. between kitchen and family room.

Book cases,

In library on side next to rear hall to be a book case, each side of door, with top passing over door, made of black walnut, of design

hereafter furnished by Architects. The expense of all which to be paid by owner.

Bay window openings arched To be segment arches over bay window openings, and finished with 1 3/4" quarter round on each corner and finished at base with an ogee, all in plaster of paris.

Gas pipes, To be gas pipes throughout the 1st and 2nd stories as marked on plans by small red circles. Meter to be in basement. The owner to make all connections with street main from basement.

All the within mentioned materials to be furnished shall be of the best quality, generally

(19)

(Finis) used for the purpose required, and all the work shall be done in a workmanlike manner, but anything omitted in the plans and specifications, necessary to carry out and complete the design in its obvious intent and meaning, shall be done by contractor without extra charge.

The entire work to be subject to the supervision and acceptance of the Architects.

Alexander kept a detailed personal diary and the following notes dealing with the erection of his house have been extracted and are included here:

1869	May 22 - foundation - Leonard & Scheire	\$1,000.00
"	June 4 " " "	1,000.00
1870	Nov. 5 - ref. to architect's plans (Monroe Scheire)	
1871	May 3 - fee for architect's plans (pd. to Leonard)	\$250.00
"	June 12 - 1st payment on house	\$3,000.00
"	July 30 - ref. to the house	
"	Aug. 21 - 2nd payment on house	\$3,000.00
"	Nov. 6 - 3rd payment on house	\$3,000.00
"	Dec. 31 - ref. to the house	
1872	May 15 - pd. to John Summers \$2,000.00 for Alexander Ramsey's Mansion House	
"	May 31 - ref. to John Summers and Alexander Ramsey's Mansion House	
1872	June 19 - ref. to the house	
"	July 8 - Paid J. Summers \$2,000.00 for plastering	
"	July 13 - pd. to " on account of Mullins	\$400.00
"	July 16 - ref. to John Summers. Rough planking, steam water pipes	\$710.18
"	July 18 - Lightning rods on Mansion House	\$68.40
"	July 22 - Workman on house for bury out of sight certain nuisance	.50¢

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" Aug. 13 - gas pipes for house \$50.30  
" Aug. 17 - a. Milner & Best - Stone work for fence \$250.00  
b. John Purvis - plastering \$727.70  
" Sept. 13 to John Summers for hanging doors \$2,000.00 So far  
J. Summers had received \$18,000.00  
" Sept. 20 ref. to Corning and the fence @2.75 a foot the gates  
to be extra  
" Sept. 23 F. Maltby (for trees) 40 @ 75¢ apiece  
" Oct. 7 Alexander Ramsey paid J. Summers for the following:  
a. cistern \$350.00  
b. wall \$475.00  
c. excavation of lot \$508.30  
d. cellar \$125.00  
e. cement \$215.00  
f. misc. \$27.00

\$1,700.90  
Heretofore 400.00  
1,300.90

1872 Nov. 5 - Alexander Ramsey's reference to his Mansion House.  
The screens and radiators brought to house to be  
painted.  
" Nov. 9 - John Summers \$1,000.00  
" Nov. 13 - Crittenden Asphalt Walks \$500.00  
" Nov. 21 - pd. John Summers \$500.00  
" Nov. 23 - pd. Corning & Depew \$500.00 (on fence) (1)  
" Nov. 24 - Alexander Ramsey wrote Alexander Stewart & Co.  
Broadway - N. Y. (for furniture)  
" Nov. 28 a. Dan Mullins \$35.90  
b. Corning & Depew \$500.00 (on fence) (2)  
c. Pd. John Summers \$2,500.00  
" Dec. 20 - Alexander Ramsey Pd. Alexander Stewart & Co.  
\$4,349.28 (see Nov. 24, 1872 entry)  
" Jan. 2 a. J. Stees - furniture - \$240.33  
b. J. F. Tostevin - marble mantles - \$1,225.00  
c. J. Matheis - carpets - \$238.55  
d. Pd. John Summers final balance \$3,350.00  
1873 Jan 3 Corning - iron fence Pd. \$500.00  
April 5 Pd. F. D. Kent \$95.00 on fence  
16 " Kent \$27.90 " "  
July 9 Dennis Madigan dirt for yard  
21 " " Pd. in full (in all \$400.00)  
  
Sept. 10 Freight on gates \$5.25  
Sept. 12 Pd. to Kent \$5.00 on fence  
19 Cost of the gates \$120.00  
27 Martin Burkley - setting gates \$47.31

DIARY ENTRIES ATTESTING THAT ALEXANDER RAMSEY  
CALLED HIS STATELY RESIDENCE "MANSION HOUSE"

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June 4, 1869  
May 15, 1872  
May 31, 1872  
July 8, 1872  
July 18, 1872

Diary entry: Nov. 21, 1872 Alexander Ramsey gave a party for the men who built his "Mansion House."

ST. PAUL NEWSPAPERS  
REFERENCES TO CONSTRUCTION OF ALEXANDER RAMSEY'S "MANSION HOUSE"

1. St. Paul Daily Pioneer, Sept. 29, 1868 p. 4., col. 1 8th item down in col. A. R. Starts to excavate for his house.
2. St. Paul Evening Dispatch, Sept. 29, 1868 p. 3, col. 2 7th item down in col. Ref. to A.R.'s residence - to cost \$50,000.00
3. St. Paul Daily Pioneer, May 16, 1869 p. 4, col. 2 ref. to the foundations being in.
4. St. Paul Daily Pioneer, July 30, 1871 p. 4, col. 3, 4th Ward Section.
5. St. Paul Daily Pioneer, Dec. 31, 1871 p. 2, col. 6, 4th Ward Section
6. St. Paul Daily Press, Nov. 23, 1872 p. 4, col. 3 Mansion House nearing completion - Mrs. Ramsey gives banquet for the workmen.
7. St. Paul Daily Pioneer, Nov. 23, 1872 p. 4, col. 1, Mrs. Ramsey's supper for the workmen, completing the house.
8. St. Paul Daily Press, Dec. 17, 1872 p. 4, col. 4 First Social Gathering at A.R.'s Res.
9. St. Paul Daily Pioneer, Dec. 18, 1872 p. 4, col. 3 Sociable at A.R.'s res for House of Hope.
10. St. Paul Daily Press, Dec. 21, 1872 p. 4, col. 3 Sociable at A.R.'s res. on Dec. 20th.
11. St. Paul Daily Pioneer, Dec. 21, 1872 p. 4, col. 2 \$75.00 realized for House of Hope at Ramsey's res.
12. St. Paul Daily Press, Jan. 1, 1873 p. 2, col. 5 - 10  
The City's Growth p. 3, col. 1

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The construction was completed in the fall of 1872, and the Ramsey family moved in during September.

The letters, notes, and specifications quoted herein are in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society, and are presently in the care of Mr. John A. Dougherty, Curator of the Alexander Ramsey "Mansion House."

6. Sources of information

a. Primary and unpublished sources: The house, furnishings, grounds, and a vast number of the personal effects and papers of the Ramsey and Furness families are owned by the Minnesota Historical Society. Many of the personal notes and building documents, including Architect Monroe Sheire's original drawings (2 plans, 2 elevations, 1 section) are filed in the "Mansion House" and are under the supervision of John A. Dougherty, Curator.

b. Secondary and published sources:

St. Paul - History and Progress, Principle Men and Institutions. Edited and published by the Pioneer Press Company. St. Paul, Minn. 1897, p. 187.

"Alexander Ramsey's Mansion House," Minnesota Historical Society, Gopher Historian, XVIII. No. 2 (Winter 1963-64), p. 1-6.

Minnesota - A State Guide (American Guide Series). New York, 1938, p. 50-60.

Koeper, H. F. Historic St. Paul Buildings. (A report of the Historic Sites Committee, a special citizens group named by the St. Paul City Planning Board). St. Paul, 1964

Minnesota's Major Historic Sites: A Guide by June D. Holmquist and Jean A. Brookins, Minnesota Historical Society, 1963. p. 29-32.

Interview with John A. Dougherty, Curator of the Alexander Ramsey "Mansion House."

Warner, George E. History of Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul. Minneapolis, 1881.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building: Alexander Ramsey was born in Hummelstown, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania on September 8, 1815. In 1839, he was admitted to the Pennsylvania Bar and entered the practice of law in Harrisburg.

An ardent Whig, Ramsey left the legal profession in 1840 to campaign for William Henry Harrison and John Tyler. In recognition of his services, he was made Secretary of the State Electoral College, and in January, 1841, he was elected Chief Clerk of the lower house of the Legislature. In 1842, Ramsey was nominated and elected to serve as Congressman in the remainder of the 28th Congress, for the district consisting of the Counties of Dauphin, Lebanon, and Schuylkill. Re-elected in 1844, he declined a third nomination in 1846. As Chairman of the Whig State Committee, he was instrumental in carrying the state for Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore.

In April, 1849, President Taylor appointed him Governor of the newly organized Minnesota Territory. Succeeded in 1853 by Democrat Brigadier General W. A. Gorman, Ramsey returned to private life and sought to develop his real estate interests.

Ramsey re-entered politics in 1855 when he was elected Mayor of the city of St. Paul. Nominated in 1857 as the Republican candidate for Governor of the State of Minnesota, he lost the election to Democrat Henry H. Sibley. In 1859, Ramsey again campaigned for governor and was elected. Before he had completed his second term, he was elected U. S. Senator from the State, and remained in the Senate for 12 years..

Ramsey served as Secretary of War under President Rutherford B. Hayes from 1879 to 1881, and later was a member of two special Government commissions. In 1886, he returned to his "Mansion House" in St. Paul where he lived until his death in 1903 at the age of 88.

Mr. Ramsey kept a detailed personal diary listing many of his important business and social contacts and a careful study of his notes is currently being made to aid in the interpretation of his life and his house. President Hayes visited the "Mansion House" on September 5, 1878, on the occasion of the opening of the Minnesota State Fair, and also for a one-week visit with Governor Ramsey (July 14-20). Mr. Adlai E. Stevenson, Vice President under Grover Cleveland's second term, was a guest of the Ramseys' on January 27, 1899.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The Alexander Ramsey "Mansion House" is an excellent example of the large private residence being built in St. Paul during the latter half of the 19th century, and is a symbol of the rapid economic and cultural development of the northwest after 1850.

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The house is of particular interest because it has been altered only slightly from its original condition, and has retained almost all of the original furnishings.

2. Condition of fabric: The building has been carefully maintained and with the exception of some minor spalling of the limestone, the fabric is in excellent condition. All of the exposed exterior woodwork has been freshly painted, and the interior wood trim has been either painted or oiled.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Number of stories and layout: Square, two-and-a-half-story main block (mansard roof) with a rectangular, two-story rear wing (gable roof) all on an elevated basement.
2. Foundations: Rubble limestone set on bedrock, exposed on the interior and faced on the exterior with large blocks of quarry-faced limestone (coursed ashlar) extending from below grade to the projecting base course at the first-floor line.
3. Wall construction: Coursed ashlar of local quarry-faced limestone, light gray in color and weathering darkly at the joints and recesses. The corners of the main block are finished with rusticated pilasters (coursed ashlar). The projecting stone base course, or watertable, is continuous around the main block.
4. Structural system, framing: Brick interior and stone exterior bearing walls with timber floor and roof framing. The floors are of sandwich construction with 3" of grout (lime mortar and broken rock) between the finished pine floor and the rough 1" tongue and groove sub flooring, all supported on 3" x 12" wood joists spanning southwest-northeast. The grouting provides effective acoustical and thermal insulation.
5. Porches: A one-story covered porch (three bays wide with projecting polygonal center bay, and one bay deep) extends across the southeast (front) elevation. The roof is supported by single pilasters at the wall line and by clusters of columns across the front (triple columns flank the outside bays and double columns frame the center bay). All columns are square (chamfered), set on plinth blocks, with applied 1/2 round moldings, and bear on square limestone piers. The porch floor is finished with 1 7/8" tongue and groove pine boards and is raised six steps above grade, with lattice panels extending between the stone piers. The entablature has a projecting bracketed and denticulated cornice with a panelized frieze and a perforated architrave. A uniform three-bay porch of similar character is



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located in the offset at the rear of the southwest (side) elevation, and a small one-bay entrance porch is located near the center of the northeast (side) elevation.

6. Chimneys: Three slender decorative and pedimented brick chimneys in the main block, two on the southwest elevation and one at the center of the northeast elevation. One simple brick chimney at the center of the northwest (rear) elevation of the rear wing.

7. Openings:

- a. Doors and doorways: Large richly paneled double entrance doors (2'-10" x 8'-0") located in the projecting center bay of the southeast (front) elevation, segmental arched head with decorative cable molding applied to the recessed wooden frames. Shallow vestibule with paneled and figured French plate glass double doors (opening measured 10'-8" high x 4'-7" wide). Secondary entrances located in the southwest elevation of the rear wing and near the center of the northeast elevation, paneled doors with recessed wooden frames.
- b. Windows: Main block--generally one-over-one-light double-hung wooden sash, segmental arched heads with rusticated reveals (trimmed with cable moldings), and massive cut and bracketed limestone labels (with keystone and chamfered reveals). The cut limestone sills are molded on the first floor and flat on the second floor. The windows flanking the main entrance on the southeast elevation extend down to the top of the limestone base course. One-story projecting bay on the first floor of the southwest and northeast of the main block elevations; sectioned octagonal bay, three windows each (one per face) with shallow entablature similar in character to the eave of the main block. Rear Wing: Windows are one-over-one-light double-hung wooden sash with flat heads, rusticated reveals, and flush limestone lintels and sills.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The main block has a mansard roof covered with hexagonal slate tiles. The rear wing has a low gable roof covered with modern bituminous roofing material.

- b. Cornice: The main block has a deep entablature with a projecting bracketed and denticulated cornice (tongue and groove board soffit) and panelized frieze. The entablature of the rear wing is similar in character but not as deep.
- c. Dormers: Eight dormers in the mansard roof of the main block. In the southeast (front) elevation there is a large Palladian motif central dormer set in a slightly projecting bay with flanking single dormers; all have segmental arched hoods with flared and bracketed eaves and projecting molded cornices, round arched openings with cable trim and five-light, double-hung wooden sash (upper sash has three lights, double arched with fixed transom). Identical single dormers are located in the other slopes of the mansard roof, two on the northeast (side) and northwest (rear) elevations, and one on the southwest (other side) elevation. The original decorative balustrades and perforated consoles were removed because of advanced deterioration.

#### C. Detailed Description of the Interior

- 1. Floor plans: Approximately square two-and-a-half-story block with a rectangular two-story rear wing. The main block has a wide central hall with flanking rooms. First floor: Large parlor on the southwest with reception room, library, and secondary hall (serving the side entrance) on the northeast. Second floor: Two bedrooms on each side of the hall. Third floor: Large nursery on the southwest and three servants rooms on the northeast.

The rear wing has a dining room, kitchen and pantry on the first floor with two bedrooms and two large bathrooms on the second floor.

- 2. Stairways: Handsome black walnut main stairway located on the southwest side of the central hall. Straight run (flared at the base) with a landing (at the second floor of the rear wing) and a short return; heavy compound turned and panelized newel, turned balusters, molded handrail, and open string with decorative floral brackets. A similar stair, less detailed and with a shorter run, provides access to the third floor. A smaller stair with an intermediate landing is located at the front of the third-floor hallway and provides access to the storage space in the attic. A simple winder stair is located approximately at the center of the rear wing and connects the basement, first, and second floors.

3. Flooring: Flooring is Minnesota white pine throughout; 3 1/4" tongue and groove on the first and second floors.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: First and second floors--wall surfaces are papered with elaborate compound plaster cornices and plaster ceilings. Third floor--wall and ceiling surfaces are plaster, painted various colors.
5. Doorways and doors: Doorways (on the first and second floors of the main block) are typically wide segmental arched openings with broad heavily molded architraves (usually composed of built-up 1/2 round moldings and jamb shafts set on plinth blocks) with paneled reveals trimmed with 1/4 round cable moldings. The doors are 2 1/2" - 2 3/4" thick, richly paneled, with heavy brass butt hinges. The doorways and doors on the third floor of the main block and two floors of the rear wing are less elaborate and have flat heads.
6. Decorative features and trim: The wooden trim is generally black walnut and butternut on the first floor of the main block, and white pine throughout the rest of the house, hand-grained in various light and dark shades. The wide compound architraves, richly paneled doors and reveals, high molded baseboards, and elaborate marble parlor mantelpieces, are the dominant features in the interior of the house. Many of the existing furnishings are original and a number of the early gaslight fixtures are still in place. Most of the windows are equipped with butternut inside shutters, hinged in four sections and recessed in the jambs.
7. Lighting: Many of the original brass and crystal gas fixtures have been electrified.
8. Heating, fireplaces: Although modernized, the hot-water central heating system is original. The fireplaces are decorative and were not used to furnish heat. There are two extremely elaborate white marble mantelpieces on the southwest wall of the parlor - round arch openings with richly carved spandrels, keystones, and angular pilaster trim (high relief fruit and foliate carvings). The marble mantelpieces in the reception room and three of the second-floor bedrooms are more restrained--round-arched openings with panelized spandrels and pilaster trim.

D. Site

1. Orientation and general setting: Situated on the west corner of South Exchange and Walnut Streets, the "Mansion House" faces southeast on South Exchange Street. The immediate neighborhood is residential in character

with a number of large 19th- and early 20th-century houses, many subdivided into smaller living units. Located less than a mile from downtown St. Paul, the area is bordered by a commercial and light industrial belt.

2. Outbuildings: A large gray frame barn, located at the rear of the house, was demolished in 1912.
3. Landscaping: The house is surrounded by a well kept lawn with shrubbery and large trees, all enclosed by a decorative wrought iron fence.

Prepared by John D. Milner, Architect  
National Park Service  
June 1964